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ANTI-SLAVERY TRACTS. No. 7. *New Series.*

TESTIMONIES
OF
CAPT. JOHN BROWN,
AT
HARPER'S FERRY,
WITH HIS
ADDRESS TO THE COURT.

"HE, BEING DEAD, YET SPEAKETH."

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1860.

EXTRACTS

FROM THE

LETTERS OF CAPT. JOHN BROWN.

“I feel quite cheerful in the assurance that God reigns, and will overrule all for his glory and the best possible good. I feel no consciousness of guilt in the matter, nor even mortification on account of my imprisonment and irons; and I feel perfectly assured that very soon no member of my family will feel any possible disposition to ‘blush on my account.’ Already, dear friends at a distance, with kindest sympathy, are cheering me with the assurance that *posterity*, at least, will do me justice. I shall commend you all together, with my beloved, but bereaved, daughters-in-law, to their sympathies, which I have no doubt will soon reach you. I also commend you all to Him ‘whose mercy endureth for ever’ — to the God of my fathers, ‘whose I am, and whom I serve.’ ‘He will never leave you nor forsake you,’ unless you forsake Him. Finally, my dearly beloved, be of good comfort. Be sure to remember and to follow my advice, and my example too, so far as it has been consistent with the holy religion of Jesus Christ, in which I remain a most firm and humble believer. Never forget the poor, nor think any thing you bestow on them to be lost to you, even though they may be as black as Ebedmelech, the Ethiopian eunuch, who cared for Jeremiah in the pit of the dungeon, or as black as the one to whom Philip preached Christ. Be sure to entertain strangers, for thereby some have — ‘Remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.’ I am in charge of a jailer like the one who took charge of Paul and Silas, and you may rest assured that both kind hearts and kind faces are more or less about me, whilst thousands are thirsting for my

blood. 'These light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.' "

"When and in what form death may come is of but small moment. I feel just as content to die for God's eternal truth, and for suffering humanity, on the scaffold, as in any other way. And I do not say this from any disposition to 'brave it out.' No; I would readily own my wrong, were I in the least convinced of it. I have now been confined over a month, with a good opportunity to look the whole thing as 'fair in the face' as I am capable of doing; and I now feel it most grateful that I am counted in the least possible degree worthy to suffer for the truth. I want you all to 'be of good cheer.' This life is intended as a season of training, chastisement, temptation, affliction, and trial, and 'the righteous shall come out of' it all. O, my dear children, let me again entreat you all to 'forsake the foolish and live.' What can you possibly lose by such a course? 'Godliness with contentment is great gain, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' 'Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land; and verily thou shalt be fed.' I have enjoyed life much; why should I complain on leaving it? . . . 'To God and the word of his grace I commend you all.' "

"It is solely my own fault, in a military point of view, that we met with our disaster—I mean, that I mingled with our prisoners, and so far sympathized with them and their families, that I neglected my duty in other respects. But God's will, not mine, be done.

"You know that Christ once armed Peter. So also in my case; I think he put a sword into my hand, and there continued it, so long as he saw best, and then kindly took it from me. I mean when I first went to Kansas. I wish you could know with what cheerfulness I am now wielding the 'sword of the Spirit' on the right hand and on the left. I bless God that it proves 'mighty to the pulling down of strongholds.' "

"I do not feel conscious of guilt in taking up arms; and had it been in behalf of the rich and powerful, the intelli-

gent, the great,—as men count greatness,—of those who form enactments to suit themselves and corrupt others, or some of their friends, that I interfered, suffered, sacrificed and fell, it would have been doing very well. But enough of this.

“These light afflictions, which endure for a moment, shall work out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. . . . God will surely attend to his own cause in the best possible way and time, and he will not forget the work of his own hands.”

“I am quite cheerful, having, as I trust, the peace of God, which ‘passeth all understanding,’ to ‘rule in my heart,’ and the testimony (in some degree) of a good conscience that I have not lived altogether in vain. I can trust God with both the time and the manner of my death, believing, as I now do, that for me at this time to seal my testimony for God and humanity with my blood, will do vastly more towards advancing the cause I have earnestly endeavored to promote, than all I have done in my life before. I beg of you all meekly and quietly to submit to this; not feeling yourselves in the least *degraded* on that account. Remember, dear wife and children all, that Jesus of Nazareth suffered a most excruciating death on the cross as a felon, under the most aggravating circumstances. Think, also, of the prophets, and apostles, and Christians of former days, who went through greater tribulations than you or I, and (try to) be reconciled. May God Almighty comfort all your hearts, and soon wipe away all tears from your eyes! To Him be endless praise! Think, too, of the crushed millions who ‘have no comforter.’ I charge you all never, in your trials, to forget the griefs of ‘the poor that cry, and of those that have none to help them.’

“‘Finally, my beloved, be of good comfort.’ May all your names be ‘written on the Lamb’s book of life’—may you all have the purifying and sustaining influence of the Christian religion—is the earnest prayer of your affectionate husband and father.

“I cannot remember a night so dark as to have hindered the coming day, nor a storm so furious or dreadful as to prevent the return of warm sunshine and a cloudless sky. But,

beloved ones, do remember that this is not your rest, that in this world you have no abiding-place or continuing city. To God and his infinite mercy I always commend you."

"I am gaining in health slowly, and am quite cheerful in view of my approaching end, being fully persuaded that I am worth inconceivably more to *hang* than for any other purpose.

"Say to my poor boys never to grieve for one moment on my account; and should many of you live to see the time when you will not blush to own your relation to Old John Brown, it will not be more strange than many things that have happened. I feel a thousand times more on account of my sorrowing friends than on my own account. So far as I am concerned, I 'count it all joy.' 'I have fought the good fight,' and have, as I trust, 'finished my course.' My love to all; and may God, in his infinite mercy, for Christ's sake, bless and save you all."

"I do certainly feel that through divine grace I have endeavored to be 'faithful in a very few things,' mingling with even these much of imperfection. I am certainly 'unworthy even to suffer affliction with the people of God;' yet in infinite grace he has thus honored me. May the same grace enable me to serve him in a 'new obedience,' through my little remainder of this life, and to rejoice in him for ever. I cannot feel that God will suffer even the poorest service we may any of us render him or his cause to be lost or in vain. I do feel, 'dear brother,' that I am wonderfully 'strengthened from on high.' May I use that strength in 'showing his strength unto this generation,' and his power to every one that is to come."

"I have many opportunities for faithful plain dealing with the more powerful, influential, and intelligent classes in this region, which I trust are not entirely misimproved. I humbly trust that I firmly believe that 'God reigns,' and I think I can truly say, 'Let the earth rejoice.' May God take care of his own cause, and of his own great name, as well as of those who love their neighbors."

"Notwithstanding 'my soul is amongst lions,' still I believe that 'God in very deed is with me.' You will not, therefore,

feel surprised when I tell you that I am 'joyful in all my tribulations'; that I do not feel condemned of him whose judgment is just, nor of my own conscience. Nor do I feel degraded by my imprisonment, my chain, or prospect of the gallows. I have not only been (though utterly unworthy) permitted to 'suffer affliction with God's people,' but have also had a great many rare opportunities for 'preaching righteousness in the great congregation.' I trust it will not all be lost. The jailer in whose charge I am, and his family and assistants, have all been most kind; and, notwithstanding he was one of the bravest of all who fought me, he is now being abused for his humanity. So far as my observation goes, none but brave men are likely to be humane to a fallen foe. Cowards prove their *courage* by their ferocity. It may be done in that way with but little risk."

"Christ, the great Captain of liberty as well as of salvation, and who began his mission, as foretold of him, by proclaiming it, saw fit to take from me a sword of steel, after I had carried it for a time; but he has put another in my hand, 'the sword of the Spirit'; and I pray God to make me a faithful soldier wherever he may send me—not less on the scaffold, than when surrounded by my warmest sympathizers.

"My dear old friend, I do assure you that I have not forgotten our last meeting, nor our retrospective look over the route by which God had then led us; and I bless his name that he has again enabled me to hear your words of cheering and comfort at a time when I, at least, am on the 'brink of Jordan.' (See Bunyan's Pilgrim.) God in infinite mercy grant us soon another meeting on the opposite shore. I have often passed under the rod of Him whom I call my Father; and certainly no son ever needed it oftener; and yet I have enjoyed much of life, as I was enabled to discover the secret of this somewhat early. It has been in making the prosperity and the happiness of others my own; so that really I have had a great deal of prosperity. I am very prosperous still, and looking forward to a time when 'peace on earth and good will to men' shall every where prevail; I have no murmuring thoughts or envious feelings to fret my mind. 'I'll praise my Maker with my breath.'"

"As I believe most firmly that God reigns, I cannot believe that any thing I have done, suffered, or may yet suf-

fer, will be lost to the cause of God or of humanity. And before I began my work at Harper's Ferry, I felt assured that in the worst event, it would certainly PAY. I often expressed that belief, and can now see no possible cause to alter my mind. I am not as yet, in the main, at all disappointed. I have been a good deal disappointed as regards myself in not keeping up to my own plans; but I now feel entirely reconciled to that, even; for God's plan was infinitely better, no doubt, or I should have kept to my own. Had Samson kept to his determination of not telling Delilah wherein his great strength lay, he would probably never have overturned the house. I did not tell Delilah; but I was induced to act very contrary to my better judgment; and I have lost my two noble boys, and other friends, if not my *two eyes*.

"But 'God's will, not mine, be done.' I feel a comfortable hope that, like that erring servant of whom I have just been writing, even *I* may, through infinite mercy in Christ Jesus, yet 'die in faith.' As to both the time and manner of my death, I have but very little trouble on that score, and am able to be, as you exhort, 'of good cheer.'"

"Let me say a word about the effort to educate our daughters. I am no longer able to provide means to help towards that object, and it therefore becomes me not to dictate in the matter. I shall gratefully submit the direction of the whole thing to those whose generosity may lead them to undertake it in their behalf, while I give anew a little expression of my own choice respecting it. You, my wife, perfectly well know that I have always expressed a decided preference for a very plain, but perfectly practical, education for both sons and daughters. I do not mean an education so very miserable as that you and I received in early life, nor as some of our children enjoyed. When I say plain, but practical, I mean enough of the learning of the schools to enable them to transact the common business of life comfortably and respectably, together with that thorough training to good business habits which best prepares both men and women to be useful, though poor, and to meet the stern realities of life with a good grace. You well know that I always claimed that the *music* of the broom, wash-tub, needle, spindle, loom, axe, scythe, hoe, flail, &c., should first be learned at all events, and that of the piano,

&c., afterwards. I put them in that order as most conducive to health of body and mind; and for the obvious reason that, after a life of some experience and of much observation, I have found *ten* women, as well as *ten* men, who have made their mark in life *right*, whose early training was of that plain, practical kind, to *one* who had a more popular and fashionable early training."

"Tell your father that I am quite cheerful; that I do not feel myself in the least degraded by my imprisonment, my chains, or the near prospect of the gallows. Men cannot imprison, or chain, or hang the soul. I go joyfully in behalf of millions that 'have no rights' that this *great* and *glorious*, this *Christian* Republic is 'bound to respect.' Strange change in morals, political as well as Christian, since 1776! I look forward to other changes to take place in God's good time, fully believing that the 'fashion of this world passeth away.'"

"I am 'joyful in all my tribulations,' even since my confinement, and I humbly trust that 'I know in whom I have trusted.' A calm peace, perhaps like that which your own dear mother felt, in view of her last change, seems to fill my mind by day and by night. Of this, neither the powers of 'earth or hell' can deprive me. Do not, dear children, any of you, grieve for a single moment on my account. As I trust my life has not been thrown away, so I also humbly trust that my death shall not be in vain. God can make it to be a thousand times more valuable to his own cause than all the miserable service, at best, that I have rendered it during my life. . . . I know of nothing you can any of you now do for me, unless it is to comfort your own hearts, and cheer and encourage each other to trust in God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. If you will keep his sayings, you shall certainly 'know of his doctrine, whether it be of God or no.' Nothing can be more grateful to me than your earnest sympathy, except it be to know that you are fully persuaded to be Christians."

"I am not a stranger to the way of salvation by Christ. From my youth, I have studied much on that subject, and at

one time hoped to be a minister myself; but God had another work for me to do. To me it is given, in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to *suffer* for his sake. But while I trust that I have some experimental and saving knowledge of religion, it would be a great pleasure to me to have some one better qualified than myself to lead my mind in prayer and meditation, now that my time is so near a close. You may wonder, are there no ministers of the gospel here? I answer, No. There are no ministers of *Christ* here. These ministers who profess to be Christian, and hold slaves or advocate slavery, I cannot abide them. My knees will not bend in prayer with them while their hands are stained with the blood of souls.

“The subject you mention as having been preaching on, the day before you wrote to me, is one which I have often thought of since my imprisonment. I think I feel as happy as Paul did when he lay in prison. He knew if they killed him, it would greatly advance the cause of Christ; that was the reason he rejoiced so. On that same ground ‘I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.’ Let them hang me; I forgive them, and may God forgive them, for they know not what they do. I have no regret for the transaction for which I am condemned. I went against the laws of men, it is true; but ‘whether it be right to obey God or men, judge ye.’ Christ told me to remember them that are in bonds as bound with them, to do towards them as I would wish them to do towards me in similar circumstances. My conscience bade me do that. I tried to do it, but failed. Therefore I have no regret on that score. I have no sorrow, either, as to the result, only for my poor wife and children. They have suffered much, and it is hard to leave them uncared for. But God will be a husband to the widow, and a father to the fatherless.”

“I have had many interesting visits from pro-slavery persons, almost daily, and I endeavor to improve them faithfully, plainly and kindly. I do not think I ever enjoyed life better than since my confinement here. For this I am indebted to Infinite Grace, and kind letters from friends from different quarters. I wish I could only know that all my poor family were as composed and as happy as I. I think

nothing but the Christian religion could ever make any one so composed.

“ ‘ My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this.’ ”

“ Although I have not been at all low-spirited nor cast down in feeling since being imprisoned and under sentence, which I am fully aware is soon to be carried out, it is exceedingly gratifying to learn from friends that there are not wanting in this generation some to sympathize with me and appreciate my motive, even now that I am whipped. Success is in general the standard of all merit. I have passed my time here quite cheerfully, still trusting that neither my life nor my death will prove a total loss. As regards both, however, I am liable to mistake. It affords me some satisfaction to feel conscious of having at least *tried* to better the condition of those who are always on the under-hill side, and I am in hope of being able to meet the consequences without a murmur. I am endeavoring to get ready for another field of action, where no defeat befalls the truly brave. That ‘God reigns,’ and most wisely, and controls all events, might, it would seem, reconcile those who believe it to much that appears to be very disastrous. I am one who has tried to believe that, and still keep trying. Those who die for the truth may prove to be courageous at last; so I continue ‘hoping on,’ till I shall find that the truth must finally prevail. I do not feel in the least degree despondent nor degraded by my circumstances, and I entreat my friends not to grieve on my account.”

“ I will add, if the Court will allow me, that I look upon it as a miserable artifice and pretext of those who ought to take a different course in regard to me, if they took any at all, and I view it with contempt more than otherwise. Insane persons, so far as my experience goes, have but little ability to judge of their own sanity; and if I am insane, of course I should think I knew more than all the rest of the world. But I do not think so. I am perfectly unconscious of insanity, and I reject, so far as I am capable, any attempts to interfere in my behalf on that score.”

“The great bulk of mankind estimate each other’s actions and motives by the measure of success or otherwise that attends them through life. By that rule, I have been one of the worst and one of the best of men. I do not claim to have been one of the latter; and I leave it to an impartial tribunal to decide whether the world has been the worse or the better for my living and dying in it. My present great anxiety is to get as near in readiness for a different field of action as I well can, since being in a good measure relieved from the fear that my poor, broken-hearted wife and children would come to immediate want. May God reward, a thousand fold, all the kind efforts made in their behalf!

“I have enjoyed remarkable cheerfulness and composure of mind ever since my confinement; and it is a great comfort to feel assured that I am permitted to die *for a cause*, not merely to pay the debt of nature, as all must. I feel myself to be most unworthy of so great distinction. The particular manner of dying assigned to me gives me but very little uneasiness. I wish I had the time and the ability to give you, my dear friend, some little idea of what is daily, and, I might almost say, hourly, passing within my prison-walls; and could my friends but witness only a few of those scenes, just as they occur, I think they would feel very well reconciled to my being here just what I am, and just as I am. My whole life before had not afforded me one half the opportunity to plead for the right. In this, also, I find much to reconcile me both to my present condition and my immediate prospect. I may be *very* insane (and I am so, if insane at all); but if that be so, insanity is like a very pleasant dream to me. I am not in the least degree conscious of any ravings, of any fears, or of any terrible visions whatever; but fancy myself entirely composed, and that my sleep, in particular, is as sweet as that of a healthy, joyous little infant. I pray God that he will grant me a continuance of the same calm, but delightful, dream, until I come to know of those realities which ‘eyes have not seen, and which ears have not heard.’ I have scarce realized that I am in prison, or in irons, at all. I certainly think I was never more cheerful in my life.”

“I am waiting the hour of my public murder with great composure of mind and cheerfulness, feeling the strong

assurance, that in no other possible way could I be used to so much advantage to the cause of God and of humanity, and that nothing that either I or all my family have sacrificed or suffered will be lost. The reflection that a wise and merciful, as well as a just and holy God, rules not only the affairs of this world, but of all worlds, is a rock to set our feet upon under all circumstances—even those more severely trying ones into which our own feelings and wrongs have placed us. I have now no doubt but that our seeming disaster will ultimately result in the most glorious success. So, my dear shattered and broken family, be of good cheer, and believe and trust in God with all your heart, and with all your soul, for he doeth all things well. Do not feel ashamed on my account, nor for one moment despair of the cause or grow weary of well doing. I bless God I never felt stronger confidence in the certain and near approach of a bright morning and glorious day than I have felt, and do now feel, since my confinement here. I am endeavoring to return, like a poor prodigal as I am, to my Father, against whom I have always sinned, in the hope that he may kindly and forgivingly meet me, though a very great way off.

“O, my dear wife and children, would to God you could know how I have been travailing in birth for you all, that no one of you may fail of the grace of God through Jesus Christ; that no one of you may be blind to the truth and glorious light of his Word, in which life and immortality are brought to light.”

“My dear young children, will you listen to this last poor admonition of one who can only love you? O, be determined at once to give your whole heart to God, and let nothing shake or alter that resolution. You need have no fears of regretting it. Do not be vain and thoughtless, but sober-minded; and let me entreat you all to love the whole remnant of our once great family. Try and build up again your broken walls, and to make the utmost of every stone that is left. Nothing can so tend to make life a blessing as the consciousness that your life and example bless and leave you the stronger. Still, it is ground of the utmost comfort to my mind to know that so many of you as have had the opportunity have given some proof of your fidelity to the great family of men. Be faithful unto death; from the exercise of

habitual love to man, it cannot be very hard to love his Maker."

"Be sure to owe no man any thing, but to love one another. John Rogers wrote to his children, 'Abhor that arrant whore of Rome.' John Brown writes to his children to abhor, with undying hatred also, that sum of all villanies, slavery. Remember, he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city. Remember, also, that they, being wise, shall shine, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

"I am very cheerful, in hopes of entering on a better state of existence in a few hours, through infinite grace in 'Christ Jesus, my Lord.' Remember the 'poor that cry,' and 'them that are in bonds as bound with them.'"

JOHN BROWN'S LAST SPEECH.

I have, may it please the Court, a few words to say.

In the first place, I deny every thing but what I have all along admitted—the design on my part to free the slaves. I intended certainly to have made a clear thing of that matter, as I did last winter, when I went into Missouri, and there took slaves without the snapping of a gun on either side, moved them through the country, and finally left them in Canada. I designed to have done the same thing again, on a larger scale. That was all I intended. I never did intend murder, or treason, or the destruction of property, or to excite or incite slaves to rebellion, or to make insurrection.

I have another objection: and that is, it is unjust that I should suffer such a penalty. Had I interfered in the manner which I admit, and which I admit has been fairly proved—for I admire the truthfulness and candor of the greater portion of the witnesses who have testified in this case)—had I so interfered in behalf of the rich, the powerful, the intelligent, the so-called great, or in behalf of any of their friends, either father, mother, brother, sister, wife, or children, or any of that class, and suffered and sacrificed what I have in this interference, it would have been all right, and every man in this Court would have deemed it an act worthy of reward rather than punishment.

This Court acknowledges, as I suppose, the validity of the Law of God. I see a book kissed here which I suppose to be the Bible, or, at least, the New Testament. That teaches me that all things “whatsoever I would that men should do unto me, I should do even so to them.” It teaches me, further, to “remember them that are in bonds as bound with them.” I endeavored to act up to that instruction. I say, ‘I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, was not wrong, but right. Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children, and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by

wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I submit: so let it be done!

Let me say one word further.

I feel entirely satisfied with the treatment I have received on my trial. Considering all the circumstances, it has been more generous than I expected. But I feel no consciousness of guilt. I have stated from the first what was my intention and what was not. I never had any design against the life of any person, nor any disposition to commit treason, or excite slaves to rebel, or make any general insurrection. I never encouraged any man to do so, but always discouraged any idea of that kind.

Let me say, also, a word in regard to the statements made by some of those connected with me. I hear it has been stated by some of them that I have induced them to join me. But the contrary is true. I do not say this to injure them, but as regretting their weakness. There is not one of them but joined me of his own accord, and the greater part at their own expense. A number of them I never saw, and never had a word of conversation with, till the day they came to me, and that was for the purpose I have stated.

Now I have done.

Leveillé

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